ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 60
WASHINGTON POST MAGAZINE
4 December 1983

SPY RINGS OF ONE

BY GEORGE LARDNER

George Lardner is a reporter on the National staff of The Washington Post.

One used to pack a silver-colored .25-caliber Beretta in his off-duty hours. The other sought refuge from a humdrum job with dreams of being a double agent.

One worked at a missile base in Kansas. The other had a beginner's desk job at the Central Intelligence Agency. Both turned over vital secrets to the Soviet Union. Spies American-style come in all shapes and sizes but 2nd Lt. Christopher M. Cooke and William Kampiles were surely two of the strangest: clean-scrubbed, earnest-looking American boys who had to work hard to convince the Russians that they wanted to compromise their nation's security.

They grew up in a world of spy novels, they played out their own roles as James Bond and they failed. The two cases are almost comedies of errors, except in the damage that was done.

Kampiles turned over the manual for the KH11 spy satellite, an amazing device that was capable of photographing billboards from hundreds of miles in space and tricking the Soviets by transmitting its data up—to another satellite—instead of down to earth as expected. "If there were two secrets in the country, that was one of them," a former intelligence official has said of the KH11's inner workings. Cooke gave away Titan II missile secrets so valuable that, according to one heretofore undisclosed Air Force document, it cost "upwards of $1 million" for the Strategic Air Command to make the "operational and security changes" necessitated by the breach.

As former attorney general Griffin Bell has observed, most spies who come under official suspicion and questioning in this country are never brought to trial. Some flee, others are pronounced personae non grata, others become double agents.

Kampiles and Cooke were mere novitiates. They were caught and prosecuted, one at an espionage trial, the other at a court-martial.

Both proceedings were striking excursions into the fantasy worlds of two young men who had genuine secrets to offer.

The Kampiles case began in 1978 with his own bizarre promotion of it in an apparent effort to obtain a starring role for himself as an undercover agent in Greece for the CIA. The son of Greek immigrants, he grew up in a well-scrubbed neighborhood in Chicago's southeast corner. Paperboy, grocery boy, altar boy, he got a job as a hospital supply salesman after being graduated from college in 1976 and made himself "No. 1 in the territory" before the CIA called, following up on a college interview.

The Agency, he found, can be a very tedious place to work, especially for someone who wants to get into covert operations. Hired as a "watch officer" in the seventh floor operations center in March 1977, Kampiles, 22, found it a shifts in a single room. The pay was $11,523 a year, some $5,000 less than he'd been making. Kampiles kept watch on machines clattering out signals intelligence, reports from the State Department and the like, photographs from the KH11. Five to 10 times a day, he filled up his burn bag, dutifully stapled it, and took it down the hall to an incinerator chute. He didn't like it at all.

Told that his hopes for a transfer were "premature," Kampiles quit in November 1977, but not, it appears, before stuffing a copy of the KH11 manual into his sport jacket one day on the way out of the building. He had, he later told the FBI, "a vague idea of selling it to the Russians" and took it with him on a trip to Athens the following February, with the Top Secret markings cut off.

Tried for espionage in the fall of 1978, Kampiles first maintained that he had simply happened by the Soviet Embassy in Athens after a night on the town, and, noticing a garden party in progress, decided to walk in and "test his fantasies."

He struck up an acquaintance with a Soviet military attaché, Michael Zavali, and, by Kampiles' account, "conned" the Russian, after four meetings, out of a $3,000 "advance" with nothing but promises and sweet talk about his CIA work and the secrets he could supply.

Even after several meetings, Kampiles testified, Michael "was a bit concerned that I might be a plant," but he said the Russian finally accepted him and gave him elaborate instructions for meeting again the following summer. John le Carre couldn't have done better. "Michael" jotted down an address on a 50-drachma ticket stub that tourists get on visits to the Acropolis. Kampiles was to send a "Happy Birthday . . . I am well" note to that address to signify he was returning to Athens. Then, once back in the Greek capital, he was to go to the Athens stadium, make his way up a cobblestone path to a certain telephone pole and stick a thumbtack in it.

That was to be the "signal" for Michael to meet Kampiles the following Saturday night at an Athens pizzeria.

Amazingly, Kampiles began touting that story to friends in the CIA and other government agencies that spring, hoping to revive STAT dream of becoming a double agent. But no one paid much attention until months later when the FBI got wind of it. The bureau had been investigating an apparent leak of KH11 secrets, reportedly evidenced by steps the Russians seemed to be taking to avoid monitoring by the satellite. The investigators were willing to buy his story about meeting Michael and the rest—everything but the $3,000-for-nothing part.

The Russians, FBI counterintelligence experts say, "never" pay something for nothing. They insist on their

CONTINUED